

2006 FALL OUTLOOK

Expectations Are Everything

By Randy Kreil

We all have expectations . . . high, low, good and even bad. Our expectations can be realistic, reasonable, improbable or impossible. Whatever the case, humans have an inherent sense of expectation and personal satisfaction largely based on whether these expectations are met, exceeded or unattained.

Expectations are everything.

Think about this concept for a moment. If you are a Minnesota Vikings football fan like I am and have watched the purple struggle through several disappointing seasons, should we really expect them to win the Super Bowl or even most of their games? Probably not. I'm content if they beat the Packers twice, win half their games, and are competitive in the ones they lose.

How many times have you heard great reviews about a movie and had high expectations for an enjoyable experience, only to watch a predictable, boring waste of time? Conversely, how many times have you gone to a film not knowing much about it – you're tagging along just to make your date happy – yet the movie turns out to be surprisingly entertaining?

Expectations certainly apply to hunting and fishing. You've experienced the excitement of hearing how the walleye are jumping in the boat and limits are a cinch. You head to the lake expecting to be home early with a limit of nice fish and stories to tell, only to spend all day trying everything in the tackle box to produce two keepers and a 6-pound carp. Your expectations were set by what you

heard, and when you failed to achieve what you had in mind, you are at best dissatisfied, and at worst angry for burning expensive gas for two 14-inch fish.

Hunting brings out the same struggle over expectations. At the start of every deer season hunters decide the size of buck they want to tag in November. For some, anything less than a wall hanger is a disappointment. In other camps, any buck, no matter the antler size, is worth celebrating because it's meat in the freezer.

Consider the varying bag limits for ducks over the years. When we had a three-duck limit during the drought of the late 1980s and early 1990s, hunters were more than satisfied to bring home two greenheads and a blue-winged teal. But since the bag limit has been six ducks a day, harvesting two mallards and a teal may cause some people to wonder if it's worth getting up at 4:30 a.m. and spending the money on gas.

If website chat rooms and coffee shop talk say everyone is getting their pheasant limit in a certain part of the state, but you take only two roosters after a full day of hunting, you may be slightly disappointed. Your expectations were high, but the results were not as expected.

There is nothing wrong with having expectations when it comes to hunting. We all have them and expectations are important as we decide how to spend our limited time and resources. It's critical, however, to temper these expectations with reality and knowledge of the factors that influence them. From year to year, we may also need to adjust our expectations depending on weather, habitat conditions, changes in wildlife populations, hunting pressure and access.

This year looks promising, but possible changes in the farm bill, significant declines

There are many quality hunting opportunities in North Dakota for both young and experienced hunters.



CRAIG BIHRLE

in Conservation Reserve Program acres, unpredictable weather patterns, and increasing losses of wildlife habitat are serious concerns for 2007 and beyond.

Expectations for the 2006 hunting season should be quite high and for good reason. We are coming off yet another nice winter and populations of most wildlife species are at or above management objectives. Habitat conditions are reasonable, however, extreme dry conditions in south central and parts of southwestern North Dakota will negatively influence waterfowl production and hunting opportunities. The dry conditions may well have the same effect on upland game bird species, ring-necked pheasants in particular.

The following reports by Game and Fish Department game management biologists will provide some insight into what hunters might experience this fall and may help set your expectations for the upcoming hunting seasons.

Remember, expectations are everything. Keep yours reasonable and attainable. Make sure your expectations are more than just how many birds you bag or the size of buck you hang on the wall, but include time spent outdoors with family and friends.

RANDY KREIL is the Game and Fish Department's wildlife division chief.



CRAIG BIHRLE

RUFFED GROUSE

Stan Kohn

Upland Game Management Supervisor
Bismarck

If you are looking for a break from hunting the prairie, try North Dakota's native forests for this nifty woodland grouse. Ruffed grouse are primarily found in the native aspen woodlands of Rolette, Bottineau, Pembina, Walsh, Cavalier and portions of McHenry counties.

Forty years of census data in North Dakota indicate ruffed grouse numbers cycle about every 8-10 years. Currently, we are at the low point in the population cycle. Even though the number of hunters and harvest has been low since 2004, a group of dedicated woodland hunters still enjoy pursuing ruffed grouse no matter how many hours they have to walk before a flush.

Spring census information was not available when *North Dakota OUTDOORS* went to press. However, there are some hopeful indications that things are about to improve. Drumming count surveys in spring 2005 showed a 37 percent increase in displaying males from 2004. As with all species, habitat is key. A good mixture of young and old aspen trees with a thick shrub understory of beaked hazel will improve nesting success and brood survival.

Ruffed grouse hunting nearly ends each year when snow blankets the forest. That can be early in North Dakota, and several months of the season may be left with virtually no one hunting these superb birds.

For the best ruffed grouse hunting in North Dakota, hunters should concentrate on the Turtle Mountains in Bottineau and Rolette counties and the Pembina Hills area of Cavalier and Pembina counties.

WILD TURKEYS

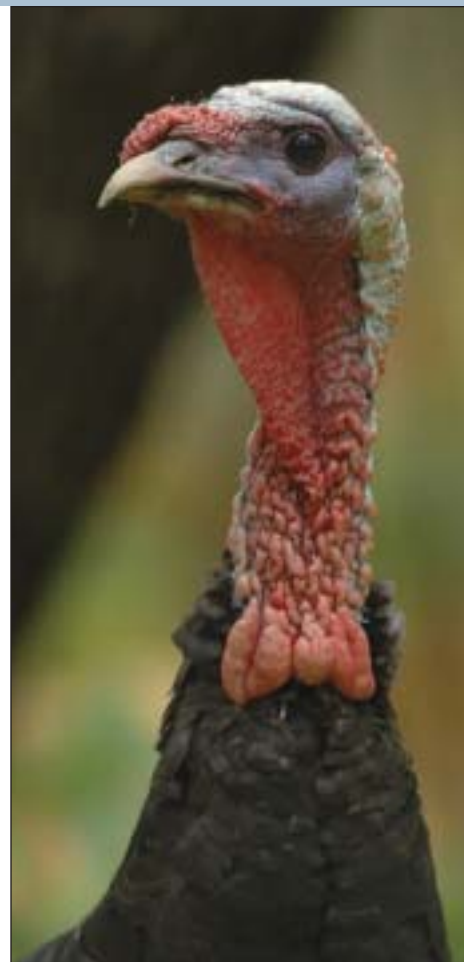
Stan Kohn

Many hunters had to work a little harder to find a wild turkey last fall. Turkey populations in several hunting units in southwestern North Dakota were down from previous years because of dry conditions and poor reproduction, while in other units bird numbers were lower, but actually at a desired density for available habitat.

Mild winter conditions throughout much of the state likely helped turkey survival, and last summer's rains improved nesting and brooding habitat in some parts of the state. There is hope that things improved from last year.

This fall, 7,925 wild turkey licenses (down 1,305 licenses from 2005) will be issued to North Dakota residents. Last fall, 6,722 hunters (third highest number on record) harvested 3,191 birds for a success rate of 47 percent. Hunters had the best success in the central and southeastern parts of the state, which is where the best turkey hunting will likely occur this fall. Turkey licenses are issued by lottery, with the number of licenses issued in each unit determined by the turkey population.

New hunting traditions are forged each fall in North Dakota.



CRAIG BIHRLE

Over the years, the State Game and Fish Department has adjusted turkey hunting unit boundaries, added new units, and opened up the entire state to increase hunting opportunities.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

Gerald Kobriger
Upland Game Management Supervisor
Dickinson

This could be the year to get back into sharp-tailed grouse hunting – for two reasons. One, the breeding population is up in all districts and, while not at record numbers, the potential exists to produce an excellent crop of young birds. Several mild winters have contributed to good winter survival. Habitat conditions were generally good and spring weather was favorable.

The second reason has to do with habitat. CRP has provided a boost to sharptails in many areas of the state. While native grasslands continue to provide habitat in much of southwestern North Dakota, the central and northern parts of the state now have good numbers of sharptails thanks to CRP. That is probably going to change, starting next year. As CRP acres dwindle, sharptails numbers will likely follow. If you enjoy sharptail hunting, and want to hunt close to home, get out while the opportunity exists.

SAGE GROUSE

Gerald Kobriger

The fall sage grouse season will probably be similar to last year. With few hunters, and a limited population, there really isn't much difference in seasons from year to year.

In summers of good rainfall, green vegetative conditions prevail into the hunting season and birds seem to be more widespread or evenly distributed. In dry years, birds move to "greener pastures" and hunters don't find them where they typically hunt.

The delayed opener may have lowered hunter participation and success somewhat, but was designed to reduce harvest of adult female sage grouse. It seems to have accomplished that goal. In the past two years (2004-05), harvest of adult birds consisted of 27 percent females. In 2002-03, adult hens made up 95 percent of the adult sage grouse harvest.



CRAIG BIHRLE

Pheasant numbers are looking good in many areas of the state.

RING-NECKED PHEASANTS

Stan Kohn

Weather and habitat have been a boon to North Dakota's pheasant population in recent years. Early estimates for 2006 point to good pheasant hunting in many areas of central North Dakota and along the Missouri River System, with southwestern and southeastern parts of the state remaining the best pheasant spots.

A series of mild winters has prevented extensive winter mortality, especially on adult pheasant hens, and the winter of 2005-06 was one of the mildest on record. The Conservation Reserve Program provides 3.3 million acres of nesting habitat on the state's landscape, resulting in an expanding pheasant population.

This spring's crowing count indicated an increase in breeding birds throughout much of the traditional pheasant range. Nesting cover in spring was good in many areas thanks to rain last summer, though the lack of snow in winter left parts of southwestern North Dakota with less than optimal nesting habitat.

Pheasant eggs hatched under optimal June weather conditions. In late June and early July, many pheasant broods were already being reported in the southern part of the state. This is a good sign, and if reproduction and brood survival is average, pheasants will be found in good numbers throughout traditional areas.

However, we are somewhat concerned about the effect of excessive heat and little rain through much of July on brood survival. We'll know more after summer brood surveys are completed in late August.

The Game and Fish Department's PLOTS program continues to provide hunting access for hunters throughout North Dakota's best pheasant range. Last fall, hunters bagged more than 800,000 roosters.

HUNGARIAN PARTRIDGE

Gerald Kobriger

Don't expect to see a lot of Hungarian partridge this fall. Data sets collected on partridge don't provide much optimism for the upcoming season. On the other hand, if you have ferreted out one of those few areas of the state where the partridge population is improving, it should be as good as or better than last year.

A mild winter and fairly good habitat conditions point to good survival from fall to spring, and spring counts were actually up from last year.

The Hun population, however, has been down for more than a decade. Many hunters today probably don't recall the good years prior to 1993. Partridge populations since 1994 have actually been relatively stable, but nothing like they once were.



DUCKS AND GEESE

Mike Johnson

Game Management Section Leader
Bismarck

Extremely dry conditions in much of central and western North Dakota were expected to considerably reduce duck production in these areas. Information from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service surveys, however, indicate that breeding habitat conditions and duck numbers in much of prairie Canada were in good shape. Pond numbers in prairie Canada are up 13 percent from 2005 and 32 percent above the long-term average. Duck numbers in prairie Canada were up 29 percent from 2005 and are 25 percent above the long-term average.

The 2006 water index in North Dakota, determined during the spring breeding duck survey, was down 14 percent from 2005, and just 3 percent above the 1948-2005 average. Still, numbers of breeding ducks in the state remained high. The 2006 duck index was down 10 percent from 2005, but exceeded the long-term average by 76 percent, making it the 12th highest on record.

The index for mallards, up 10 percent from 2005, was 137 percent above the long-term average and was the seventh highest on record. Pintails were up 7 percent from 2005, but were 13 percent below the long-term average.

Numbers were down from 2005 for most other duck species, but all except canvasback were still significantly above the long-term average.

Most of North Dakota received little moisture over winter and little rainfall in spring and early summer, therefore wetlands receded considerably from 2005. The exception is extreme southeastern North Dakota and some parts in the northeast, which had flood conditions in spring. The remarkable wet

Despite declining water conditions, breeding mallard numbers were up in North Dakota this spring.

cycle, which began in summer 1993, appears to be waning in much of the state, but only time will tell if we are now reverting to a more typical wet/dry prairie cycle.

Despite large populations of ducks and the prospect for at least reasonable production in some portions of the state, and an expected good fall flight out of Canada, autumn weather always plays a major role in success of hunting. We will have to wait and see what October brings.

Resident Canada goose numbers in North Dakota remain high and are well above objective levels. The Department's May breeding duck survey showed an increase from 190,670 Canada geese in 2005 to 206,860 birds in 2006. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey data showed a decrease from 239,800 in 2005 to 232,600 in 2006. The early September hunting season will remain in place to try to reduce this population.

MOURNING DOVES

Mike Szymanski

Migratory Game Bird Biologist
Bismarck

Things are looking up for fall's mourning dove season. Although numbers of doves heard along survey routes in May were lower than 2005, unseasonably warm spring temperatures helped kick off an excellent first hatch. This should mean that many pairs could have three to four strong nesting attempts this year, especially in the southern third of the state.

Hopefully, this year's early spring doesn't correspond to an early fall and winter. If we avoid really cool nights in late August, some areas of the state should have pretty good hunting opportunities for the September 1 opener.

New for 2006 is the inclusion of Eurasian collared doves and white-winged doves in the daily bag limit of 15 doves. Eurasian collared doves are about half-again the size of mourning doves, and are lighter colored with a squared-off tail. They also have a thin black collar on their neck. White-winged doves are slightly larger than mourning doves, have large white patches on their wings, and a squared-off tail. These two species are not native to North Dakota, but have been increasing in abundance in recent years.

Mourning dove banding continues across the country and in North Dakota. Hunters are reminded to look for banded mourning doves in their bag and report bands to the Bird Banding Laboratory at 800-327-2263.

SANDHILL CRANES

Mike Szymanski

The spring population index for the Mid-Continent Sandhill Crane Population has declined somewhat. It's too early to predict the fall flight in North Dakota, and weather and hunting pressure throughout the migration corridor will dictate when birds arrive in the state.

North Dakota's two unit structure (Zone 1 west of U.S. Highway 281 and Zone 2 east of U.S. Highway 281) for sandhill cranes will continue. Zone 1 has a season length of 58 days and a daily bag limit of three cranes, whereas Zone 2 has a season length of 37 days and a daily bag limit of two cranes.

Nonresident crane hunters can hunt with either a nonresident small game or waterfowl license. Hunters using a nonresident waterfowl license must stay in the waterfowl zones dictated by their license. Hunters are also reminded to be sure of their target before shooting, as federally endangered whooping cranes may be present throughout North Dakota this fall. Please report all whooping crane sightings to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Bismarck at 701-328-6300.

WHITE-TAILED DEER

Bill Jensen

*Big Game Management Biologist
Bismarck*

In 2005, the overall success rate for the regular deer gun season was about 76 percent. Both archery and muzzle-loader hunter success last year were slightly above average at 39 and 49 percent, respectively. Following another mild winter, fall 2006 is looking to be another good year for white-tailed deer hunters.

Winter aerial surveys, hunter observations and deer-vehicle collision reports all suggest stable to increasing deer numbers along a band running diagonally from southwestern to northeastern North Dakota.

For the last several years, the Game and Fish Department has set aggressive harvest rates for antlerless deer. The result is reduced deer numbers nearer to management goals in the northwestern and southeastern corners of the state. In response to high deer numbers in selected units, particularly the northeast, 143,500 deer gun licenses are available to hunters this fall. This is below the all-time high of 145,600 licenses in 2005.

The long-term goal is to reduce overall deer numbers so that about 100,000 licenses will maintain a relatively stable deer population. To reach this goal, the majority of licenses made available in recent years have been for antlerless deer.

Hunters take note: Each year hunting season opening dates slide back and forth because of changes in the calendar. In 2005, the regular deer opener reached its earliest date in the cycle with a November 4 opener. In 2006, we shift back to the latest opener of November 10. Also, after years of public input, the split seasons in units 2B and 3C have been eliminated.

With the increasing popularity of electronic applications over the Internet (about 47 percent of hunters applied this way in 2006), license processing is becoming faster and more efficient. Hunters with second and third (or more) doe licenses can use these licenses during the archery and muzzle-loader seasons with the appropriate firearm or bow in the designated hunting unit.



RON WILSON

The number of deer gun licenses in 2006 is again well over 100,000.

MULE DEER

Bruce Stillings

*Big Game Management Biologist
Dickinson*

North Dakota hunters will have another fall with good opportunities to hunt one of the state's most coveted big game species. A series of mild winters, coupled with a conservative harvest strategy, have significantly increased the state's mule deer population since 1996.

According to aerial counts in spring 2006, the mule deer population in North Dakota's badlands remains much higher than average. The spring index indicated nearly nine deer per square mile, which is considerably higher than the long-term average of slightly more than six deer per square mile. Last October's fall demographic survey was also positive. Counts indicated the population had nearly average production and a higher than normal buck-to-doe ratio of 43 bucks per 100 does.

Mule deer have also increased in other southwestern North Dakota hunting units adjacent to the badlands. As a result, the number of any-antlered and any-antlerless deer licenses have increased in these units. North Dakota hunters should expect another hunting season with high success rates typically ranging between 80-90 percent.

PRONGHORN

Bruce Stillings

The 2006 pronghorn survey indicates a population that is near management objectives, resulting in a slight decrease in the number of licenses available. Even so, the 2006 season will still provide above average opportunities for pronghorn hunters.

North Dakota's pronghorn population took a major hit during winter 1996-97. Several mild winters later, coupled with a conservative harvest strategy, pronghorn numbers increased from a low of 4,000 animals in 1998 to about 15,000 in 2005.

The 2005 season featured the largest number of gun licenses ever issued in the state, which reduced pronghorn numbers. The Department's harvest strategy has shifted the last two years to one of maintaining pronghorn at objective levels instead of encouraging population growth.

In early July, biologists conducted aerial surveys of more than 18,000 square miles (96 percent of the primary pronghorn range in the state) to determine abundance, distribution and demographics of North Dakota's population. The results indicate a statewide population estimate of 12,500 animals (down 18 percent from 2005) and age and sex ratios of 35 bucks per 100 does and 65 fawns per 100 does.

Despite the slight decrease in population, pronghorns remain at or above the targeted goal in all management regions west of the Missouri River. These regions will remain open to both gun and archery hunting in 2006 with 3,810 gun licenses available. Pronghorn east of the Missouri River remain at a level too low to sustain a harvest.

MOOSE

*Roger Johnson
Big Game Supervisor
Devils Lake*

North Dakota's fall moose season, featuring 129 licenses, should be similar to 2005 when 129 license holders harvested 115 moose for an 86 percent success rate.

Snow conditions in 2005-06 allowed surveying of all moose management areas in the northeastern corner of the state. The survey indicated a slight decrease in moose numbers, but increases on the prairie have stabilized moose license numbers. Because of the low count in the Pembina Hills area, Unit M1C will be closed in 2006. Moose licenses in M10 north and west of Minot went from 20 to 30 to stabilize increasing moose numbers in this area of the state.

This summer there were reports of moose along the Missouri River near Bismarck and in the Williston area. The continued expansion of moose across the state will most likely result in expanded moose hunting opportunities in the future.

To try to determine the cause of moose population declines in the timbered areas of the state, the Game and Fish Department helped fund a project with the University of North Dakota, where 10 animals were fitted with radio transmitters. Five moose in the Turtle Mountains and five in the prairie area of the Lonetree Wildlife Management Area are featured in the study. Information from the study will help biologists better manage this unique species in North Dakota.

Many hunters enjoy the challenges of bowhunting for North Dakota's big game species. White-tailed deer generate most of the action.



GREG GULLICKSON

BIGHORN SHEEP

*Brett Wiedmann
Bighorn Sheep Biologist
Dickinson*

North Dakota's six bighorn sheep license holders should have good hunting opportunities in 2006. The Department increased the number of hunting units from two to four, as Unit B1 (south of Interstate 94) became units B1 and B2, and Unit B4 (north of Interstate 94) became units B3 and B4.

The unit boundary changes were made to more effectively distribute hunting pressure. The number of licenses issued increased from four to six, with one license each in units B1, B2 and B4; and two licenses in Unit B3. The purchaser of the auction license can hunt in all open units. The North and South Bullion herds, which were decimated by a late 1990s die-off, will be reopened to hunting in 2006.

In 2005, the Game and Fish Department issued two bighorn sheep licenses in Unit B4 and one in Unit B1, along with one auction license valid in both units. The auction license, sold by the Minnesota-Wisconsin Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, raised \$43,000 for North Dakota's bighorn management program. All 2005 hunters harvested rams, including a new state record.

This year's lamb crop should be off to a good start thanks to spring rains in the badlands.

In January 2006, 19 bighorns were transplanted to North Dakota from Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge in Montana in an effort to establish a new herd near the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Two in-state transplants were also conducted in January to augment herds in other parts of the badlands. Similar to past transplants, last winter's projects were funded by the Minnesota-Wisconsin conservation group.

The state's bighorn population has increased 83 percent since the Department's management partnership with MN-WI FNAWS in 1999.

Two habitat improvement projects were completed last winter as select juniper pockets were removed from known lambing areas used by the Chateau herd, significantly increasing visibility, which is essential for ewes to protect lambs from predators. Biologists were encouraged to see the Chateau nursery group, consisting of ewes and newborn lambs, using the treated areas during the spring 2006 lambing season.

ELK

Roger Johnson

There are a number of changes for the 2006 elk season. A total of 241 elk licenses are available, an increase of 40 licenses from 2005. Unit E1, open for only antlerless elk in 2005, will be open for both antlered and antlerless elk in 2006. The December portion of the E1 season, however, will continue to be for antlerless elk only. To reduce the number of elk outside Theodore Roosevelt National Park, 20 more antlerless licenses are available in Unit E3. Units E3 and E4 will have a second open hunting period in October.

Changes in the E3 and E4 hunting season are based on increased elk sightings during the Department's mule deer surveys, National Park Service data collected on radio-collared elk, and local observations.

Surveys in both the Pembina Hills and Killdeer Mountain areas in 2005-06 showed that elk numbers remain within management goals. In 2005, 216 licensed hunters harvested 107 elk for 49 percent success. Hunter success in 2004 was 48 percent.

In 2006, 241 elk licenses were available to North Dakota hunters.



CRAIG BIRLE

FURBEARERS

Dorothy Fecske

Furbearer/Wildlife Disease Biologist

Bismarck

North Dakota continues to provide excellent trapping opportunities for many common furbearers. Spring surveys show that muskrat and skunk numbers are up, and raccoon, badger and mink are about the same statewide compared to last year.

Even though the number of coyotes harvested and sold to fur buyers increased in 2005, the population remains about the same. Coyotes are found throughout North Dakota, but the western half of the state has more.

If you're planning on trapping red fox this year, the Missouri Coteau supports higher numbers of animals relative to other regions of the state, but surveys indicate that in general, numbers of fox families per township are down again this year. The number of fox pelts sold to fur buyers also decreased for the fourth consecutive year.

Beaver numbers are a little lower this year, although the drift prairie and Red River Valley regions continue to support higher densities compared to the western half of the state. Beaver harvest, as well as the number of pelts sold to fur buyers, was down from the previous year. Muskrat numbers remain low compared to past years, and the number harvested and sold to fur buyers declined for the fourth consecutive year. However, the state's muskrat population is on the rise for the second year in a row. The greatest muskrat densities occur in the drift prairie region.

One furbearer that has made front page news on more than one occasion in the past year is the mountain lion. Last September, the Department initiated an experimental hunting season on lions. The hunt was a success and the Department gained a good deal of biological information from the few animals taken. A second statewide experimental season will begin September 1 and end on March 11, 2007, or when a quota of five animals has been reached. Legal animals include any mountain lion other than kittens (lions with visible spots) or females accompanied by kittens. Hunting with dogs will be allowed after January 1. Any lion taken must be reported within 12 hours and the entire intact animal must be submitted to the Game and Fish Department. Legally taken animals will be returned to the hunter following analyses.

Some less common furbearers are making a comeback in North Dakota. River otters sightings are on the rise along the Red River, Missouri River and Lake Sakakawea. Fishers are also becoming more frequently spotted in eastern North Dakota. Swift fox, if not here already, may be headed our way from Montana and South Dakota, where they have been reintroduced. A population survey is planned in early fall to document its presence in western North Dakota. Wolf sightings have increased in recent years, although no breeding population has been documented in North Dakota. Wolves are considered endangered and are protected.

2006-07 HUNTING SEASON DETAILS

SNIPE	
Open Area:	Statewide
Opens:	Sept. 16
Closes:	Nov. 26
Daily Limit:	8
Possession Limit:	16
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

HUNGARIAN PARTRIDGE	
Open Area:	Statewide
Opens:	Sept. 9
Closes:	Jan. 7
Daily Limit:	3
Possession Limit:	12
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

TREE SQUIRRELS	
Open Area:	Statewide
Opens:	Sept. 9
Closes:	Jan. 7
Daily Limit:	4
Possession Limit:	12
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Tree squirrels may be taken only with firearms loaded with shot, rimfire and muzzle-loading firearms, or with bow and arrows legal for taking upland game.

WOODCOCK	
Open Area:	Statewide
Opens:	Sept. 23
Closes:	Nov. 5
Daily Limit:	3
Possession Limit:	6
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

CANADA GEESE (September Season)	
Open Area:	Statewide
Opens:	Sept. 1
Closes:	Sept. 15
Daily Limit:	5
Possession Limit:	10
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Besides possessing the required licenses, hunters must be HIP certified. Residents and nonresidents are eligible to hunt.

Nonresidents who hunt during this season in Sargent and Richland counties may do so without counting against their 14-day, or two seven-day hunting period restrictions.

COCK PHEASANT		
Open Area:	*Regular Season	**Delayed Opener
Opens:	Oct. 14	Oct. 21
Closes:	Jan. 7	Jan. 7
Daily Limit:	3	
Possession Limit:	12	
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset	

ONLY MALE PHEASANTS MAY BE TAKEN

*Regular season is statewide except for Delayed Opener area.

**Delayed Opener includes area in Williams and McKenzie counties starting where BN Railroad enters North Dakota, then east on the railroad tracks to the west boundary of the Trenton Wildlife Management Area (southwest of Trenton) then south and east on the boundary of the Trenton WMA to the Missouri River, then directly across the river, then west to the Yellowstone River, then south and west on the Yellowstone River to the Montana border, then north to the point of origin.

As per legislative action, nonresidents cannot hunt any game from October 14 through October 20 on North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife management areas or on Private Land Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS) areas.

CROWS	
Open Area:	Statewide
Fall Season	Opens: Aug. 12
	Closes: Oct. 22
Spring Season	Opens: Mar. 17
	Closes: Apr. 29
Daily Limit:	There is no limit on crows.
Possession Limit:	
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

In addition to the crow season, crows may be taken when committing or about to commit depredations as specified in Federal law (50CFR21.43).

RUFFED GROUSE	
Opens:	Sept. 9
Closes:	Jan. 7
Daily Limit:	3
Possession Limit:	12
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Open Area – Bottineau, Rolette, Cavalier, Pembina and Walsh counties in North Dakota. Also that portion of the J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge in McHenry County lying south of the Upham-Willow City Road is open to ruffed grouse hunting.

Finding hutable water in some parts of North Dakota may be the water-fowler's biggest challenge in 2006.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

Opens:	Sept. 9
Closes:	Jan. 7
Daily Limit:	3
Possession Limit:	12
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Open Area – Statewide except for that portion of North Dakota bordered on the west by N.D. Highway 32, on the north by the Sheyenne River, on the south by N.D. Highway 11 and on the east by the Red and Bois de Sioux rivers, and an area in Grand Forks County bordered on the east by the Red River, the south by U.S. Highway 2, the west by ND Highway 18, and the north by the Walsh and Grand Forks county line. Both areas are closed to sharp-tailed grouse hunting except during the special prairie grouse season to people who received lottery permits to hunt during that season.

MOURNING DOVES

Open Area:	Statewide
Opens:	Sept. 1
Closes:	Oct. 29
Daily Limit:	15
Possession Limit:	30
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

It is illegal to hunt doves or other birds resting on utility lines or fixtures adjacent to such lines.

SANDHILL CRANES

Open Area:	UNIT 1	UNIT 2
Opens:	Sept. 16	Sept. 16
Closes:	Nov. 12	Oct. 22
Daily Limit:	3	2
Possession Limit:	6	4
Shooting Hours:	1 pm CDT Sept. 16 thru Oct. 29 1/2 hour before sunrise to: 2 pm CST Oct. 30 thru Nov. 12	

Unit 1. That portion of North Dakota west of U.S. Highway 281.

Unit 2. That portion of North Dakota east of U.S. Highway 281.

Hunters may not aggregate daily bag or possession limits from the two units. (A hunter may take up to 3 cranes in one day, provided all 3 birds are taken from Unit 1, or no more than 2 birds are taken from Unit 2.)

In addition to other licenses required, sandhill crane hunters must possess a \$5 sandhill crane hunting permit available from the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Bismarck office.

It is unlawful to shoot from open water or from a boat or other floating vessel in open water while hunting sandhill cranes.

SAGE GROUSE

Opens:	Sept. 25
Closes:	Sept. 27
Daily Limit:	1
Possession Limit:	1
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Open Area – Area south of Interstate 94 and west of U.S. Highway 85 in southwestern North Dakota.

BEAVER HUNTING, TRAPPING AND UNDERWATER SNARING

Open year-round (Officially from Apr. 1, 2006 – Mar. 31, 2007)

BEAVER SNARING ON LAND

Opens: Nov. 18 – **Closes:** May 6

From March 12, 2007 through May 6, 2007, snares must be within 50 feet of water; they must be no more than 4 inches off the ground and they must have a stop restricting loop size to 12 or less inches in diameter.

Beaver dams may be dismantled when their presence causes property damage.

MINK AND WEASEL TRAPPING

Opens: Oct. 21 – **Closes:** Mar. 11

MINK AND WEASEL SNARING

Opens: Nov. 18 – **Closes:** Mar. 11

WEASEL HUNTING

Opens: Oct. 21 – **Closes:** Mar. 11

Weasels may be hunted statewide with .22 caliber rimfire rifles or pistols, muzzle-loaders of .45 caliber or smaller, longbows, and crossbows.

MUSKRAT TRAPPING

Opens: Oct. 21 – **Closes:** Mar. 11

MUSKRAT SNARING

Opens: Nov. 18 – **Closes:** Mar. 11

Muskrat huts may be opened for insertion of traps or snares; however, the huts must be restored to their approximate original condition to prevent freeze-up.

In addition, muskrats may be trapped statewide with foothold traps or colony traps using underwater sets that are at least 2 inches under water, or trapped with conibear-type traps or snares with no more than 2 inches of the conibear trap or snare above the water surface from March 12, 2007 through May 6, 2007. During this time period, float-sets are prohibited, and trapping or snaring on the outside of any muskrat house or structure of any size is prohibited.

MUSKRAT HUNTING

Opens: Nov. 18 – **Closes:** May 6

MINK HUNTING

Opens: Nov. 18 – **Closes:** Mar. 11

Mink and muskrat may be hunted statewide with .22 caliber rimfire rifles or pistols, muzzle-loaders of .45 caliber or smaller, longbows and crossbows.

BOBCAT – HUNTING, TRAPPING

Opens: Nov. 10 – **Closes:** Mar. 11

BOBCAT SNARING

Opens: Nov. 18 – **Closes:** Mar. 11

Open only in the area south and west of the Missouri River.

The pelt and carcass of each bobcat must be presented to Game and Fish Department personnel for inspection and tagging prior to sale or transfer of possession, but no later than 14 days after the close of the season. Absolutely no bobcat pelt will be tagged until the animal is skinned and presented with the intact carcass. The carcass then becomes the property of the Department. No fur dealer shall possess or purchase an untagged bobcat.

RED FOX, GRAY FOX, COYOTE, RACCOON AND BADGER HUNTING OR TRAPPING

Open year-round (officially from Apr. 1, 2006 – Mar. 31, 2007)

In addition, red fox, gray fox and coyote may be hunted at any hour from Nov. 20, 2006 through March 18, 2007. Any hunter who engages in the hunting of red fox, gray fox, or coyote during the time from 1/2 hour after sunset to 1/2 hour before sunrise, must hunt exclusively on foot and use a predator call. The use of a spotlight or any other artificial light is prohibited.

RED FOX, GRAY FOX, COYOTE, RACCOON AND BADGER SNARING

Opens: Nov. 18 – **Closes:** Mar. 11

WATERFOWL SEASON DATES

Early Canada Goose Season

Opens: Thursday, September 1

Closes: Thursday, September 15

Shooting hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Bag limit: Five Canada geese daily, 10 in possession

Note: Nonresidents can hunt during the early Canada goose season in Sargent and Richland counties without counting against their 14-day regular season period. Nonresidents who hunt in other counties during this season would have at least a seven-day period count against their 14-day license.

Youth Waterfowl Season

(For legally licensed residents and nonresidents ages 15 and younger)

Opens: September 16

Closes: September 17

Shooting hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Bag limit: Same as for regular duck and goose season.

Regular Duck Season

Low Plains Unit:

Opens: Saturday, September 23 (residents only), September 30 (nonresidents)

Closes: Sunday, December 3

Shooting hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

High Plains Unit

Opens: Saturday, September 23 (residents only), September 30 (nonresidents)

Closes: Sunday, December 3

Opens: Saturday, December 9

Closes: Sunday, December 31

Shooting hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Daily limits: Five ducks, which may include five drake mallards, two scaup, two redheads and two wood ducks. The daily limit of five may include only one hen mallard or one canvasback or one pintail (see related story on Hunter's Choice on page 15). Possession limit is twice the daily limit.

The High Plains Unit is the portion of North Dakota that, starting at the South Dakota border, is west and south of a line beginning with U.S. Highway 83 and I-94 to Wilton, then following ND Highway 41 to ND Highway 53, then west on 53 back to U.S. 83, then north to U.S. Highway 2, then west to the Williams County line, then north and west along the Williams and Divide county lines to the Canadian border. The Low Plains Unit is that portion of North Dakota east of the High Plains Unit.

Canada Geese

Statewide

Opens: Saturday, September 23 (residents only), September 30 (nonresidents)

Closes: Thursday, December 21

Shooting hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to 1 p.m. each day through October 28. Starting October 29, shooting hours 1/2 hour before sunrise to 2 p.m. each day. Exception: shooting hours for Canada geese and white-fronted geese are 1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset on all Saturdays and Wednesdays during the season.

Daily limit: Three Canada geese daily and possession limit is six.

White-Fronted Geese

Statewide

Opens: Saturday, September 23 (residents only), September 30 (nonresidents)

Closes: Sunday, December 3

Shooting hours: Same as for Canada geese

Daily limit: Two geese, possession limit is four.

Light (Snow) Geese

Statewide

Opens: Saturday, September 23 (residents only), September 30 (nonresidents)

Closes: Thursday, December 21

Shooting hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to 1 p.m. each day through October 28. Starting October 29, shooting hours 1/2 hour before sunrise to 2 p.m. each day.

Daily limit: 20. There is no possession limit for light geese.

For additional information, see the Department's website at gf.nd.gov, or pick up a copy of the 2006 North Dakota Waterfowl Hunting Guide.

Even during lulls in the action, a fall day spent outdoors in North Dakota is a treat.

